

13 November 1963

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Initial Aims of The 26 of July Movement

1. The 26 of July Movement had its origins and developed its strength as a movement of the Cuban middle class against the Batista dictatorship and the corrupt political system of which Batista was a product. The Castro brothers themselves, all the other leaders of the 26 of July Movement, as well as the bulk of the membership were of the middle class--medium landowners, professionals, businessmen, and students. The ideas and principles that were eloquently stated by Castro expressed a consensus of Cuban middle class opinion and the middle class in the 1950's constituted the most politically aware and articulate public opinion. Castro could never have succeeded, as he himself publicly admitted in December 1961, if from the outset he had openly expressed the policies he was later to implement. Theodore Draper, in the first chapter of his book Castro's Revolution, very effectively explodes the Communist myth that the Cuban revolution was a "peasant revolution" into which the working class subsequently was "swept."

2. The stated aims of the 26 of July Movement, which represented a genuine expression of the desires and goals of the most articulate portion of the Cuban public, were contained in a number of public statements by Castro between 1953 and 1958.

3. The stated political goals: In his 1953 "History Will Absolve Me" speech, delivered in his own defense before a Batista court, Castro predicted that the first revolutionary law would be restoration of the 1940 constitution and made an allusion to a "government of popular election." Castro's manifesto of July 1957, his first political declaration from the Sierra Maestra, contained what he called a "formal promise" of general elections at the end of

one year and an "absolute guarantee" of freedom of information, press, and all individual and political rights guaranteed by the 1940 constitution. Castro's letter of 14 December 1957 to the Cuban exiles upheld the "prime duty" of the post-Batista provisional government to hold general elections and the right of political parties, even during the provisional regime, to put forward programs, organize, and participate in elections. In an article in Coronet magazine of February 1958, Castro wrote of fighting for a "genuine, representative government," a "truly honest" general election within 12 months, "full and untrammelled" freedom of public information and all communication media, and reestablishment of all personal and political rights. In the "unity manifesto" of July 1958, Castro agreed "to guide our nation, after the fall of the tyrant, to normality by instituting a brief provisional government that will lead the country to full constitutional and democratic procedures."

4. The stated economic goals: In his 1953 speech, Castro supported the idea of grants of land to small farmers and peasants with indemnification to former owners; the right of workers to share in profits. Castro's land reform program advocated maximum holdings for agricultural enterprises and the distribution of unused land to farming families --with indemnification for former owners. In addition, the 1953 speech expressed the intention to nationalize the electric and telephone companies. Again, in his July 1957 manifesto, Castro defined his agrarian program as the distribution of barren lands, with prior indemnification, and the conversion of squatters and sharecroppers into proprietors of the lands worked on. Law #3 of the Sierra Maestra on Agrarian Reform, dated 10 October 1958, less than two months before Castro's coming to power, was based on the principle that those who cultivate the land should own it. This law made no mention of "cooperatives" or "state farms" and its stated intent was to implement the hitherto neglected agrarian reform provisions written into the 1940 constitution.

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This law was signed by Fidel Castro and by Dr. Humberto Sori Marin, who participated in drafting it. Sori Marin, incidentally, was executed on Castro's orders in April 1961. He, like many--perhaps most--of the original 26 of July members, came to recognize too late that Castro had betrayed the revolution that brought him to power.

5. The near unanimity with which Castro's victory was accepted in January 1959 was not merely the result of his heroic struggle or his charismatic qualities; it was because the ideas he had expressed and the promises he had made embodied the hopes and expectations of the great majority of the Cuban people and especially of the middle classes. This national consensus resulted from the disappointments with the corrupt and aimless "democratic" governments of 1944 to 1952 and the Batista despotism of 1952 to 1958. There was broad agreement that Cuba could never go back to corrupt brand of democracy of Prio Socarras or Grau San Martin, and the Cuban middle class was ready for significant social and political reforms to make impossible a return to the past.